

A vibrant garden scene featuring a large, leafy tree on the left, a path leading to a wooden bench in the distance, and a field of purple flowers in the foreground. The text "MANOR FIELDS" is overlaid at the top.

MANOR FIELDS

GARDEN NEWSLETTER 2024



Prunus 'Kanzan'

INTRODUCTION

As a reminder and for information to those recently arrived on the Estate, the garden strategy is to reflect the Arts and Craft character of the Manor Fields Houses, taking inspiration from Gertrude Jekyll's style, while having regard to affordability, practicality and the evolving nature of our environment due to climate change.

Arts and Craft style favours more formal planting arrangements closer to the Houses to contrast with our more natural planting distribution in the woodland and open areas. We aim to maintain a mix of plants, providing seasonal interest and reducing the maintenance burden. This takes priority over the garden room philosophy associated with Arts and Craft design such as a herbaceous border that provides great sweeps of summer colour, but little else through the rest of the year. In recently planted areas, I was however able to focus the character; where ferns could dominate in the shaded understory or spikey foliage would define a line of sight.



Jekyll had a deep appreciation of nature and subscribed to a philosophy of working with nature; choosing plants suited to the environmental conditions, soil type and aspect. Many particularly beneficial plants with the RHS plants-for-pollinators designation were incorporated into the planting scheme. These include *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*, *Oenothera lindheimeri* 'Whirling butterflies', *Berberis thunbergii* 'Concord', *Pulmonaria* 'Trevi Fountain', *Ceanothus* 'Concha'.



Left:
Euphorbia characias
subsp. *wulfenii*
Right:
Oenothera lindheimeri
'Whirling butterflies'

NEW PATHS AND GARDEN BEDS ALONG BEDE AND KEBLE

One of the main drivers of change in Manor Fields' gardens is the impact of regular refurbishments to the Houses. Inevitably a certain amount of damage occurs as a result of scaffold poles and builders' boots leading to gaps in the planting scheme. Some years ago, a long-term plan was decided on to implement a one-metre-wide path between the Houses and plant beds, on a phased basis. The multiple benefits include;

- 1) More space to site future scaffold, resulting in less damage to the gardens
- 2) The path slate, which replaces the soil, has a reduced surface area that drains water rather than holding onto it. (As does the permeable horticultural fabric installed just beneath this layer to

suppress weeds)

3) The reduced moisture levels in the vicinity of the brickwork and an increase of airflow to the wall helps reduce water ingress which, over years, will have a positive effect.

This was first carried out along Balliol in 2016 and in 2023 paths and new beds were created along most of Bede and Keble

PREPARATION & IMPLEMENTATION

As many shrubs as possible were retained and planted elsewhere on the estate, including roses transplanted to the sunken garden and hydrangea transplanted to the rear of Bede. The best quality topsoil, lifted during the construction of the path, was collected by the gardening team and stored for later use. While factoring in a reduced lawn area, 70 metres of new beds were marked out and the turf removed. Tonnes of compost produced in-house on the Estate were added to prepare the beds for planting while digital mock-ups and planting plans were drawn.



Gertrude Jekyll's plant favourites, such as purple flowered Acanthus was

situated alongside lavender to create harmonious colour pairings and in another spot, with a south facing aspect, Santolina will run along the edge of a path. From another perspective, a sufficient number of new established plants were positioned in the beds alongside younger specimens, so that we

did not have to wait years for these new garden beds to mature.

OTHER NEWLY PLANTED AREAS

The hot summer of 2022 and winter snow cover delivered a killer blow to several shrubs and trees. Many of our older hebes died which is not too surprising as hebes characteristically have 5 – 10 good years before looking tired and leggy. This presented the need for more planting!

The removal of these hebes opened up large areas at Gonville, Glenalmond, Selwyn and in the roundabout.



Repetition and harmony of plant selection across the estate has also been considered. Cuttings taken from our established Phormium 'Alison Blackman' have been used as well as repetition of other previously planted shrubs such as Spiraea Vanhouttei, Choisya ternata 'White Dazzler' and Nandina domestica.

Clear stem euonymus now mirror the bay trees in a space opened up at the north end of Girton. Additional planting here includes Osmanthus burkwoodii and Lonicera nitida which is a shrub by evergreen form of honeysuckle.

Another phormium cutting was planted on the corner of Selwyn alongside Raphiolepis umbellata, native to Korea. A birdbath has been purchased for this location and will be arriving in the next couple of months.

WILDFLOWER AREAS

Perennials weeds such as dock have been dug out of wild flower areas and native wild flower seeds have been added to various patches in the gardens. A very small but useful percentage of the 9000 m2





of lawn at Manor Fields is left unmown for insects and pollinators. In addition to the food that longer grass and wildflowers provide, the shelter and habitats they create are vital.



The insect hotels have been cautiously tidied and while I'm on this topic, I highly recommend a documentary film called *My garden of a thousand bees* which I believe is available on Sky-Go.

Graham Houston on wildflowers:

"A visiting wildflower expert, surveying our garden a few years ago, remarked on the number of rare wildflowers hidden in our central lawns. He ascribed this to the fact that the area had never been put to the plough. Lamentably he did not leave us with his checklist of plants identified, but we must clearly continue to avoid chemical lawn maintenance."

NEWLY PLANTED TREES

Since the last Newsletter we have planted a number of new trees including:

Arbutus unedo (The Strawberry tree)
Malus x moerlandsii 'Profusion' (Crab apple)
Cercidiphyllum japonicum (Katsura)
Crataegus prunifolia 'Splendens' (Hawthorn)
Betula pendula 'Tristis' (Weeping birch)
Laburnum x watereri 'Vossii' (Laburnum)



Above: The Sugar Maple Jubilee tree (*Acer saccharum*)
 Right: A tree anchor illustrated here was installed to give extra stability to the newly planted Cedar of Lebanon



THE TWO CLEAR FAVOURITES FOR THE JUBILEE TREE.

A Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) was planted on the main lawn in autumn 2022, to celebrate the Queen's jubilee and in 2023 a Cedar of Lebanon was added providing an evergreen presence. The latter will retain a conical growth habit until maturity, after which its branches will spread out horizontally, flattening its profile and cutting a fantastic shape in just about any skyline. Half its purchase price was funded by some generous resident donations for which we are truly grateful as it enabled us to procure a more mature specimen.

NEW TREE WORKS

The tree survey of 2023 identified works for 51 trees, specifying tasks such as the felling of dead trees, some crown reductions and removal of dead wood. The tree surgeons carried out most of their work in March while the gardening team has been able to complete 12 works in-house. This included the removal of a dead ornamental hawthorn behind Keble house and a semi mature Yew on the boundary opposite Harvard.



Left: Tree surgeons high up in an oak tree

Below: The gardening team removes a dead hawthorn tree behind Keble



Zoltan's chainsaw training from two years ago continues to generate savings.

NEWLY TURFED AREAS

Newly laid turf was added to a number of problem areas. Decaying tree roots caused a large dip in one area while in other locations tyre damage was patched up. A particularly uneven level between the pavement and lawn along Selwyn was also rectified by building up the soil. Although there is reluctance to add lawn protection posts across the whole estate, some will be installed

outside Magdalene where there are frequent cases of people driving onto the lawn. Newly purchased tractor attachments will increase our ability to maintain and improve the lawns through a staggered programme of treatments beginning this spring.

WINDOW BOXES BEDDING AND USE OF PERENNIALS

The designs for the summer window boxes and bedding areas, which will arrive in May, were drawn up and ordered in October 2023. During the last few summer and winter seasons I chose to include a number of perennial plants that will contribute to the gardens beyond their seasonal display. This has added plants to areas including a spot at the main entrance where hellebores fill a space previously taken up by a clump of bamboo. Other perennials that featured in the window box designs and were later planted out include *Oenothera lindheimeri* (also known as Gaura) ferns, *Skimmia* and *Polyanthus*.



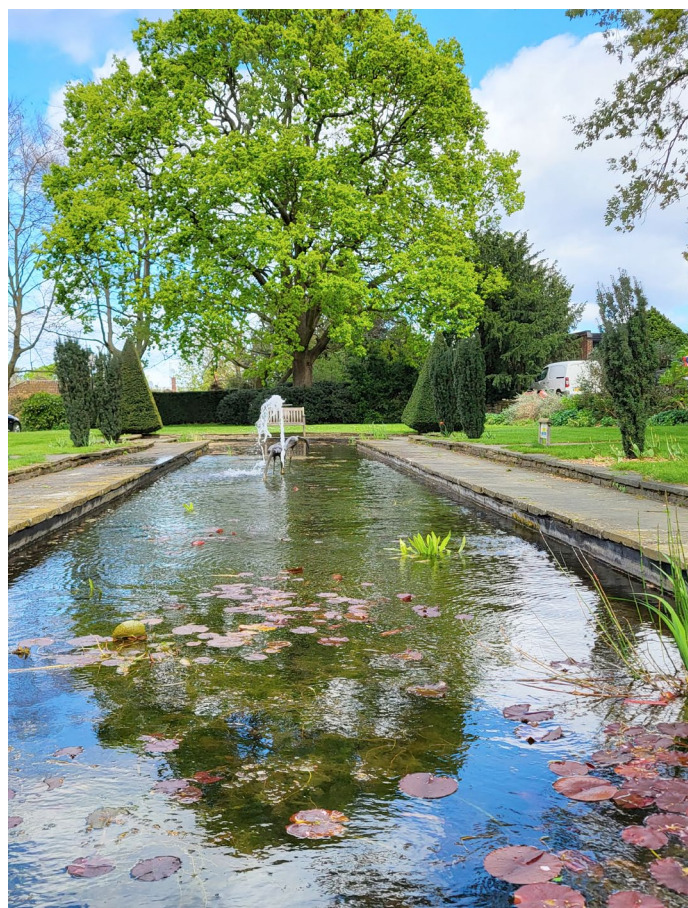
MULCHING

From January, a significant amount of woodchip, equivalent to several lorry loads, has been added to the beds at no cost and we have achieved near total coverage.

The woodchip mulch provides enormous benefits to plants and trees. It encourages and feeds the populations of bacteria, fungi and detritivores that breakdown organic matter into humus. Some of these populations compete with harmful pathogens such as honey fungus while others form symbiotic relationships with plants providing nitrogen in exchange for sugars and a place to live.

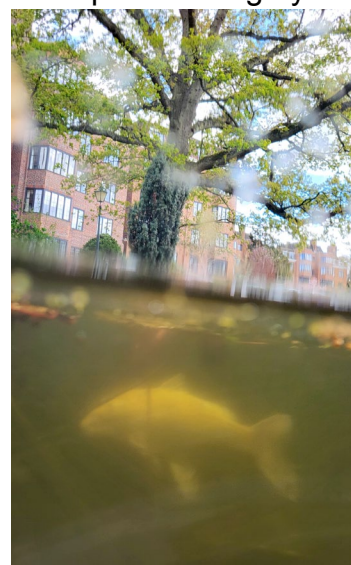
The Humus that is produced from the breakdown of the woodchip improves not only the texture of the soil and its nutrient value but also its ability to retain moisture. The mulch shades the dark soil protecting it from the drying effects of extreme heat in summer while insulating plant roots from extreme cold in the Winter. Weeds are also suppressed reducing the maintenance burden, providing a better general appearance and reduc-

ing competition with other plants. In other beds, many tonnes of compost were added to enrich the soil freeing up an empty bay for the composting of new plant clippings, grass clippings, collected leaves and woodchips.



POND WORKS

The pond liner has reached the end of its useful life and will be replaced later this year. During this project the plants and fish will be temporarily housed in storage tanks. The silt will be removed, dried and eventually used as a fertiliser. The old liner will be removed and replaced with a new one that maintains the pond's integrity for the next 20 years. Fish identified as wild carp, will not be returned to the pond. These tend to arrive as eggs stuck to the feathers of visiting birds. Rest assured that Frankie (the large carp) and the many goldfish will be carefully tended during the works.



Graham Houston:

"The original garden pond was under Glenalmond House before the northern part of the estate was leveled for building works. This is the reason why the underground stream now runs down the middle of the estate and below our current pond. We plan to use our own supply of underground water from the south of the estate to fill the pond in future."

Christopher Holt, a resident ecologist, conducts monthly pond reports for us detailing temperature, water clarity and various chemical analyses. His valuable input helps inform everything from when we should stop feeding the fish to the aquatic plant we introduce.



Orontium aquaticum frozen in ice

The following passage is a contribution by Christopher Holt

"When a property in Manor Fields is advertised for sale, the estate agency will often include a photograph of the pond in its brochure.

This is not surprising. People are drawn to water features, particularly if they are sited in the lower areas where, historically, rainwater would have collected in meres as they do on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath. Each of these natural ponds is a unique ecosystem with its own unity of function and structure with only a minimum of human intervention.



Mandarin ducks spotted at Manor fields in April this year

When we look at the contour map of Manor Fields we can see that the original designers followed the basic rule that the ornamental pool should be located in the lowest portion of the estate, even to the extent of excavating its own sunken garden.

Natural and artificial ponds are different. Natural ponds are always in a state of transition because of the accumulation of silt which ultimately transforms them from clear water holes into wetlands, swamps, vleis and finally grassland, a process of 'succession' which may last centuries.

Ornamental ponds, on the other hand, will not survive at all without human stewardship. A professional choice of plants will ensure that the bottom of the pond will remain stable, that through regular monitoring, the water quality will stay in balance, that the aquatic environment will not overheat, that algae can be kept under control and that there will be enough safe habitats for a variety of amphibians, water insects and their larvae. The water itself should be sufficiently pure for visiting animals and birds to drink without harm. Oxygenation is particularly important which is why the fountain is kept flowing.

All this effort is repaid many times. Our pond in particular is a venue of immeasurable worth. Residents and their visitors are drawn to its beauty, children witness the sublime pageant of the seasons and are excited when they witness



Red Lobelia cardinalis 'Queen Victoria'

their first tadpoles, blue dragonflies and damselfish, the arrivals of the mallards and grey herons and in summer the smaller birds and butterflies sipping water from the damp corner pots and fresh shoals of baby fish.

The pond also does its bit to offset climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide in the stems and leaves of floating plants to provide our water species with shade and coolness in the summer.

We are all indebted to the skilled gardening team of Manor Fields for maintaining and enhancing this lovely corner of the estate. Perhaps the greatest gift of the pond and its surrounds is in nurturing the peace and serenity of the human spirit."

I-TREE SURVEY

In addition to the annual tree survey a special assessment was carried out by the arborist this year to measure carbon sequestration, pollution particulate absorption, surface water interception and financial valuations of trees on this estate. The report, when it arrives, will contribute to Manor Fields' sustainability action plans led by members of the sustainability committee to guide us to a Net Zero target by 2050.

ALLOTMENT GARDEN

The allotment initiative run by a volunteer team has proved a great success.

NEWS FROM MF ALLOTMENT

By Valerie Ferguson

"Five years into our flourishing MF allotment project behind Bede house, the volunteers have been busy preparing the vegetable beds,



sowing seeds, and planting out seedlings in time for our regular Saturday morning organic produce sales to start in early June.

This year we're expanding our planting of the most popular vegetables in particular potatoes and golden courgettes which are always in great demand. There will also be new varieties of lettuces and carrots on offer.

We aim to garden as sustainably as possible using compost, leaf mould and wood chip made on site and our produce is harvested to order - you can't get more local and fresh than that!



As residents will be aware there are a lot of inquisitive foxes and cats on the estate and their curious natures have been detrimental to the allotment – if they see a newly planted bed or one covered with horticultural fleece it's a signal to them to investigate and play havoc with the planting. In order to deter them a walk-in aluminium and net cage has been erected.

A notice will be placed in all stairwells when the produce sales start again and we hope you will come along to buy, have a chat, exchange recipes, and support the charity Thrive <https://www.thrive.org.uk/how-we-help/regional-centres-and-programmes/london> where we make an annual donation at the end of the allotment selling season.

We also have big plans for the popular herb garden in the orchard. As the wooden structure is now disintegrating Stuart, the head gardener, his team and allotment volunteers will be rebuilding and expanding the whole structure to incorporate existing and new varieties. The herbs are free for all residents to harvest sustainably and make an excellent accompaniment to our delicious produce. We're always happy to



welcome new volunteers to the allotment team so, if you'd like to join our merry band, please call the coordinator, Valerie Ferguson, on 020 8789 9976 or email her on valerieferguson123@gmail.com."

ORCHARD HERB GARDEN

In collaboration with Valerie Ferguson, the orchard herb garden will be refurbished. Residents are welcome to help themselves and for future reference the RHS has advice on the best way to harvest specific herbs. Here is a summary (please note the recommendation for scissors to be used in some cases)

Basil – Harvest the tips of the plants back to just above a pair of leaves. New growth will emerge at this point. Don't nip just below the leaf, leaving a short stem, as this will simply wither.

Parsley – Take a few leafy stems from the outside of a plant, snipping them near the base with scissors.

Chives- Snip with scissors just above the base.

Mint- Picking off soft shoot tips will encourage new growth

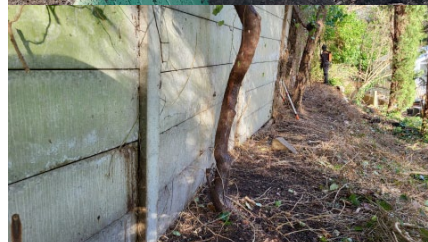
Rosemary- Snip off shoots maintaining a good shape to the plant. As with most perennials never cut more than a third of the plant.



James on the ride-on mowing the pond lawn



Jamie on the tractor distributing compost



The team cuts back ivy from the boundary wall which brings in more light to the greenhouse area



Zoltan on the tractor: 40 meters of box hedging, ravaged annually by the box caterpillar, are removed.



Part of a wider drive to use water more sustainably, a recently purchased 300 litre water butt will collect water from the greenhouse roof to be used on new propagated plants, the allotment beds and trays of bedding that arrive in May.

CONCLUSION

The gardening team would like to thank many residents for their positive comments and support. We also appreciate the ongoing input and guidance from all members of the gardening committee

Stuart Kuhn